Go forth with Grace

Lenten Devotionals & Meditations

Daily devotionals and meditations, written by members of the Daughters of the Holy Cross and the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, humbly offering spiritual guidance through this season of Lent.

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Introduction

Lent 2011

“Be not conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God.” Romans 12:2

Lent is a season of preparation. The liturgy for Ash Wednesday invites us in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent. One of the means by which we can do this is by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. The meditations contained in this booklet have been submitted by members of the Daughters of the King and the Brotherhood of St. Andrew. In addition, Father Gregg Riley has added two. The meditations are based on the daily Lectionary readings for Year One beginning with Ash Wednesday on page 950 in The Book of Common Prayer. They have been written with the intent that you will add them to your Lenten discipline. It is our prayer that these meditations will aid in your reflection and stimulate your prayers as you prepare yourself spiritually to celebrate anew the joy and surprise of Easter.

May you have a blessed Lent.

Brotherhood of St. Andrew
Daughters of the Holy Cross
The beginning of our Lenten journey is made with a right intention and with the mark of the ashes which aptly remind us of our mortality, and our continual need of repentance. But somewhere between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week many will lose their focus. For some people coming to Ash Wednesday service and receiving the sign of the cross is like a Lenten resolution. Our intentions are good but we lack the “sticktuitiveness” to maintain our Lenten discipline throughout the 40 days. Those things we promised ourselves we will stop doing and those things we have promised ourselves that we will do get lost in the day to day routine of living. Even participation in the events of Holy Week get lost too. Sometimes we find ourselves at Easter not certain just how we got there!

We all need more than good intentions, or even right beginnings, to keep steadfast in our discipline. Think back to last week's gospel. It was the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. As spectacular as that event must have been for Peter, James, and John, it faded and what they were left with was an exhortation from God to "listen" to Jesus. Setting aside our right intentions that most likely will fade over these 40 days, and even a right beginning whose ashes will likewise fade before the day has ended, let us focus on "listening to Jesus."

Listening to Jesus over these next 40 days is one way we can stay tuned to God and maintain our Lenten discipline. For listening has to do with attention. Listening is an art. It takes effort. We have to listen to God with our hearts, minds, and with our spirits. It is in our effort to listen to the voice of God that we re-connect with the very source of life itself. It is in listening to God that we experience the fullness of joy and the life that it ours in Him. It is in listening to God that we turn away from sin and death and towards light and life. Like the ashes traced on our foreheads, the exhortation from the Holy Mountain reminds us of our need to remain connected to the Lord of Life in all that we do and say. The daily turning to God in heart, mind, and spirit keep us connected, in season and out, so that at the end of our life's journey we will rejoice in the reality of resurrection.
As we begin Lent, we should focus our cry to this purpose as we approach the resurrection of our Lord. We are all called to see and be witnesses that Jesus is the Son of God. Can you imagine the awe that John the Baptist must have felt when he saw the dove descend upon Jesus – knowing he was seeing the Holy Spirit reveal him as the Son of God? God wants to reveal this to each of us. But we must be open to his voice, to his nudges, to his Holy Spirit. We open ourselves to God and his word through daily Bible study. We must know what God’s word says before we can hear what God is trying to tell us. Otherwise we will fall for whatever man tries to tell us. Each of us must seek out the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God for ourselves. Just hearing it or stating what we’ve heard others say will not give us personal knowledge of Jesus. We must get to know him through his word and through a personal relationship with him. There is a difference in knowing someone upon sight and knowing someone personally. I challenge you this lent to get that personal relationship. I challenge you to get to the point that you, too, can say, “I have seen and have borne witness that Jesus is the “Son of God”.
John the Baptist was with two of his disciples. One was Andrew and the other possibly John the apostle. John the Baptist revealed “The Lamb of God” to the two. They left him and began to follow Jesus. Andrew rushes to find his brother Simon and proclaim that they have found the Messiah. After this event we don’t hear much more about Andrew but he continues to bring others to Jesus. He brought the boy with the fishes and loaves to hear Jesus. He also brought the Greeks who were asking about the Messiah to Jesus. Jesus looked at Simon and gave him a new name, Cephas or Peter (both translate into “The Rock”). Jesus saw who Peter was and who he would become. In the Old Testament a new name meant the person knew God in a different way. We see Abram become Abraham and Jacob become Israel. When we come to know God we become a new person. Andrew was the first disciple. He didn’t get a lot of publicity, but by his belief in the Lamb of God he started a movement that now numbers in the hundreds of millions. During this period of Lent, of reflection and meditation, is there anyone you can bring to Christ? This seemingly simple act could change the lives of just one person or possibly millions.
Wow, two small but life changing words! If only we will do as Jesus asks. Philip recognized Jesus as the one the Law and the prophets had foretold! What do you do when you experience something great? You want to share it with someone else. You want them to experience the same thing. That's exactly what Philip did. He went to his friend, Nathaniel and invited him to meet Jesus. Nathaniel was reluctant to meet anyone from Nazareth but Philip simply said, "Come and see" (evangelism at the beginning). Nathaniel quickly realized who Jesus is and called him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel". Two regular guys whose lives would never be the same upon meeting and following Jesus. As Christians we are drawn to follow Jesus. It's that personal relationship with him that needs to be nurtured and practiced. Good deeds, attending church services and giving of our time and treasure are outward and visible signs of our new Life in Christ. In the end, the number one question that we will have to answer is, did we bring others into the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

*Help us, dear Lord, to always hear your call! Amen.*

Refrain from the hymn, "The Call": "Hear now the call, ‘come follow me!’ Answer the call - give Him your all! In Him you'll find who He made you to be, He will transform you - He will set you free!"
Deuteronomy tells us to obey God’s commandments. We do this by obeying God with our heart, our will, our mind, our body, our finances, and our future.

In times of plenty, we often take credit for our prosperity and become proud that our own hard work and cleverness have made us rich. It is easy to get so busy collecting and managing wealth that we push God right out of our lives. But it is God who gives us everything we have, and it is God who asks us to manage it for him!

The next time you arrive safely in your car somewhere remember to praise God for protection also let your table prayers serve as a constant reminder of the Lord’s goodness to you and your duty to those who are less fortunate.
Lenten Day Six  
Tuesday, March 15, 2011

Psalms  45 † 47, 48  
Deuteronomy 9:4-12 †  Hebrews 3:1-11 †  John 2:13-22

*His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me”. John 2:17*

This particular story takes place early in the ministry of Jesus, just after the first miracle done at the wedding feast of Cana. This is the first Passover after Jesus’ ministry has started and he is incensed that the establishment of the temple has turned the whole act of worship into a money making enterprise. Every worshiper who came to the temple needed animals for sacrifice and change to make the necessary tithes, and enterprising people had turned the temple into an agora or market to meet this need. But then just as now Jesus isn’t concerned with making the mechanics of worship easy, he is interested in making worship of his father genuine. This means having to plan and prepare to worship God in his church. The moral of this story is not that commerce is bad, but that going through the motions without serious commitment just isn’t acceptable. Showing up unprepared and empty handed means the worshiper isn’t really committed to the act of worship, he is just going through the motions. Jesus wanted the Jews who were going to temple to think about the act of worship, plan what they needed and bring it with them. He knew that the act of self reflection, planning and preparation are the truly important parts of worship. With the proper preparation done ahead of time the act of worship at the temple (church) is then truly a time when God is glorified and the worshiper’s soul is nourished.
Lenten Day Seven
Wednesday, March 16, 2011

Psalms 119:49-72 † 49 [53]

“Help one another to stay faithful. Hold firmly with confidence. If you hear God’s voice, do not be stubborn.” Hebrews 3:12-19

My own path of being faithful is definitely enhanced by other peoples’ help. When you feel yourself in need, there are many other supports out there. My preference is other people. But there are the Bible, books, TV, study groups, the Internet and many more.

I was fortunate enough to go on a mission trip to another country last year. Being with a group of 49 other people coming together for one purpose -- God's work -- was so inspiring. It's very humbling to have God put you in the right place for his service. The support we all gave each other was so heartwarming. And most of these people were strangers.

I look back at the different stages in my life and amazed at the people who helped me along. There were family, friends, co-workers, and strangers. I thank God for them and see his blessings.

Society and our own church present us with lots of struggles in keeping faith. So, especially during Lent, let’s remember to support one another. Also, remember it's all about God and our salvation.
Lenten Day Eight
Thursday, March 17, 2011

Psalms 50 † [59, 60] or 19, 46
Deuteronomy 9:23 - 10:5 † Hebrews 4:1-10 † John 3:16-21

For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son,
that who so ever believes in Him should not
perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16

Love, a simple word, but I believe that in this brief sentence we have the essence of the entire New Testament. The magic and miraculous word of this whole collection of books is love. We hear it from the pulpit. It is part of every sacrament, said or implied. It is enshrined in most Christian marriage ceremonies. We use it daily in our conversations with God and Mankind. But, do we live it? Or is it merely a word we toss about in self satisfaction, vainly assuming that the magic will work without further effort on our part. Granted, much if not most of our usage is heartfelt and genuine. But let us examine our use and refine it during this Lenten Season. May we try harder to use this wondrous word in the Godly fashion in which it is given to us in this sentence. The sentence delivers God’s definitive gift of Grace and the foundation of our salvation. In itself it is the source of a lifetime of meditation. In another section of this reading, we find St. John using again the word light, another commanding word in his teachings. Please refer to the first 13 verses of his Gospel “The Little Gospel” and reflect on the intensity of his teaching using this other simple word.
Lenten Day Nine  
Friday, March 18, 2011  
Psalms 95 and 40, 54†51  
Deuteronomy 10:12-22† Hebrews 4:11-16† John 3:22-36  

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Wow! This verse could be placed anywhere in the Bible and still fit in to any biblical time as it so fits for us today. John is stating a mere fact after having been with Jesus. He tell others, “He must increase, but I (We) must decrease.”

All of your lives are so full of activities. We are constantly, working, planning trips, watching sporting events, raising children, cooking, cleaning, etc.; the list goes on and on. When do we stop to think about what it is we are actually doing and what enables us to even do these most precious things? When do we realize that it is not about me? When do we lessen ourselves and take into consideration that we are not at all responsible for what is going on? We must stop, lessen ourselves unto the Lord and give God the glory and be still and know God. We must increase Him in our lives so that the daily things we do are for and about Him, not us at all.

As most of us do in Lent, we give up something. Why? Do we just go through the motions of just doing it for doing its sake? No, we are to do it for the sake of emptying our lives, lessening ourselves in order to let Christ increase in our lives. You just can’t imagine how great our Lord is if you don’t know Him. Get to know Him this Lent. Allow Jesus’ wonderful presents to enter and fulfill your life. You just won’t believe it! His increase will definitely be your best blessing ever!
Lenten Day Ten  
Saturday, March 19, 2011

Psalms 55 † 138, 139:1-17 (18-23)  
Deuteronomy 11:18-28 † Hebrews 5:1-10 † John 4:1-26

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.” John 4:23

This passage is the familiar story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The town is identified as Sychar in John’s gospel and is the Old Testament city of Shechem, located in the region of Samaria, which lies between Judea and Galilee. Jesus had left Jerusalem after coming into conflict with the Pharisees over His ministry. Samaritans and Jews hated each other for both historical and religious reasons. Each group claimed to practice the true religion descended from Abraham and Moses. Samaritans only recognized the first five books of the Bible and could only worship at their temple on Mt. Gerazim. Jews accepted the remaining books of our Old Testament and worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. In addition to this racial animosity, rabbis avoided speaking to a woman in public. This particular woman had a very notorious life having had five husbands and currently living with a man who was not her husband. Her reputation was such that she came to the well at a much later time than most of the women, who came much earlier in the day. Thus we can see that she was an outcast among a despised people. Jesus, weary and thirsty, turns a casual request for water into a profound discourse on the water of life (i.e. the Gospel) which He offers to all. The woman refers to the different traditions and places of worship of the two peoples, and Jesus tells her that soon “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” When the woman says that when Messiah comes all these conflicts will be resolved, Jesus then tells her “I who speak to you am he”. Jesus is telling us that the Good News of the redeeming love of God is offered to all, not limited by nationality or even orthodox Jewish tradition. The only thing keeping us from God’s offer is our own rebelliousness and pride.

“Lord Jesus, your love never fails and your mercy is unceasing. Give me the courage to surrender my stubborn pride, fear, and doubts to your surpassing love... Make me strong in faith, persevering in hope, and constant in love”
One day, Jesus was talking to a woman. When the woman returned to her friends and family, she was amazed and shared with them that a man had told her everything about her life. She said, “Could he be the Messiah?”

Imagine someone who knows everything that you have ever said and done. Jesus does know our thoughts and sees our actions. He knows us better than we know ourselves. To think that He knows everything brings shame to me. I know I have let Him down…time after time. To think that over 2,000 years ago, that he took a massive beating for my sins is unthinkable. He knows the sins I have committed and the ones I will commit even though I have free will. However, He still loves me even though I have failed Him. What an awesome God we have!

In this passage, the disciples were begging Jesus, “Teacher, have something to eat!” Jesus answered, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Jesus said to them, “My food is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do.” It is so simple but I seem to mess it up time and time again. We are here to OBEY God and to complete the work He has assigned us to do while we are here on earth! This sounds simple but many times I wonder what I am suppose to be doing for Him. My heart says to study His word and be still. He is here and waiting for me to seek Him…to study Him…and to receive His direction.

Dear Lord, Thank you so much for dying for my sins! I dedicate my life to you! Jesus, I am here...ready for you to show me the way! I love you, my Lord!
Each year during the Lenten Season we Christians embark on a journey in search of our salvation. It is a journey that that we sometimes fear, but if we are wise, we know that it is one that we must make. It is a journey that both carries us across familiar and comfortable terrain but also leads us into places dark and unsettling, even frightening. The journey of which I speak is of course our personal climb to Calvary and the foot of Christ’s cross. Because of our humanity, our imperfection, our fallen and rebellious nature, it is a journey that we must repeat each year of our lives.

In the Old Testament reading assigned for this day, the ancient prophet, Jeremiah, delivers to the house of Jacob and “all the clans of the house of Israel” a rebuke from God. God’s rebuke is brought about quite simply because the children of Israel have, once again, been faithless to God despite God’s steadfast faithfulness to them. They have turned away from God and committed spiritual adultery by loving idols more than the living God.

The rebuke which God delivers to Israel in the assigned reading is quite profound for in it God identifies two evils that his people have committed. These are evils that they have committed before and that, sadly, God’s people continue to commit. Jeremiah identifies these evils in verse 13: “…for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

God, in his mercy and because of his steadfast love for his creation, has provided the way for us to fix our broken cisterns in order that they may indeed hold water, and no ordinary water to be sure. Through faith in our savior, Jesus, the Christ, each of us is given the ability to hew out a cistern into which God will pour the “living water” of salvation and eternal life with him.

Praise be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Lenten Day Thirteen
Wednesday, March 23, 2011

Psalms 72 † 119:73-96
Jeremiah 3:6-18 † Romans 1:28 - 2:11 † John 5:1-18

**For ever, O Lord, thy word is firmly fixed in the heavens.**
_Psalm 119:89_

God speaks words expressing his will in order to cause it to be done. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was! According to scripture, the word of God not only creates all things, but also determines all that occurs in creation. In other words, the word of God rules the world. What He says goes!

We are called to recognize that the word of God is the absolute truth because truth is God’s nature. His word is the standard by which all else is to be measured. Without it, our lives make no sense and, therefore, we must obey it. Fortunately, we can trust it and depend on it to light our path, strengthen our faith and draw us closer to our Creator. What a comfort to know that His word is firmly fixed in the heavens!

...And the Living Word on which our faith is grounded
_Calls us to meditate on ancient truth,_
_Daring to extract truth from its conveyor,_
_Allowing accumulated considerations_
_To lead us into a world not known_

_Sweet indeed is the word of God,_
_Printed, heard, felt, admired, questioned..._

_The truth of the universe_
_Proceeds from the mouth of God,_
_Wisdom and understanding_
_Quite beyond the grasp_
_Of our collective mind,_
_And we skip happily along_
_Living into this truth of truths..._

_(Poetic Justice, by Jim Wilson)_
In modern vernacular we might refer to Psalm 71 as a pattern for a “senior citizen’s prayer.” The elderly psalmist first thanks God for his protection from birth--for being his rock to keep him safe. Then he begs God to continue to protect him in old age. His enemies lay plans against him, believing that God has forsaken him. Although the psalmist has seen “troubles and adversities,” he believes that God will “restore his life.” God will “strengthen . . . enfold and comfort” him. Because of God’s goodness to him, he will sing praise to the Almighty with the lyre and the harp and proclaim His power to future generations.

Following the psalmist’s example in our present generation, we need to thank God for his past blessings and trust in His future protection. We do not need to play a lyre or a harp to proclaim God’s righteousness. We need to proclaim it in our lives.
Lenten Day Fifteen
Friday, March 25, 2011

Psalms 95 and 69:1-23 (24-30) 31-38 † 73
Jeremiah 5:1-9 † Romans 2:25 - 3:18 † John 5:30-47

“O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.” Psalm 69:5

So often we justify our actions, not taking into account the damage our deeds have done or the very fact that we simply aren’t following God’s laws. In this season of Lent, we need to look inward and see who we are and where we stand in God’s eyes. Max Lucado tells the story of his daughter Andrea. She had gotten a splinter in her finger and wanted it “fixed.” As she followed her daddy into the bathroom, her eyes widened when she saw the alcohol, cotton balls, tweezers, ointment, and a band-aid being set out on the counter. Even before he turned back to her, she said, “I just want the band-aid, Daddy.” Now these were fancy band-aids with Bible verses on them, but by itself the band-aid could not heal her finger, it could just cover it. A lot of times we are like that little girl. We come to Christ with our sins, but we just want them covered up, not removed. We want to skip the pain of cleansing and removal. We should know by now that we can hide nothing from God. In this season, we need to bare our souls to God and be accountable for our folly. Open your heart to God and ask Him to come in and cleanse your spirit and heart in anticipation of Easter.
Lenten Day Sixteen
Saturday, March 26, 2011

Psalms 75, 76 † 23, 27
Jeremiah 5:20-31 † Romans 3:19-31 † John 7:1-13

“For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.”

In his letter to the Church at Rome, St. Paul makes a statement that Christians have debated ever since and will continue to debate until Christ comes again. Will faith alone, without any works, save a person? Those who agree can point to the repentant thief who was crucified with Jesus. After all, there were no “works” that the thief could do before he died. Those who disagree can point to Jesus’ admonition that not everyone who speaks in his name will be saved.

C. S. Lewis, who was a master at using analogies to vividly illustrate his views, compares the argument between faith and works to an argument over which of the two blades of a pair of scissors is the more important. Without both blades, scissors are useless. Is that not the case with faith and works?

Perhaps we can look at it this way. Faith is invisible and intangible. We cannot “see” if a person truly has faith. Indeed, we cannot “prove” to anyone that we have faith. There may be times when even we question the strength of our faith. Faith is much like love. It is easy for a person to say the he or she has faith or love, but do they?

If we love another person, our actions (not mere words) demonstrate that love. If we love that person, then we want to do things for that person. Actions (“works”) likewise demonstrate that we have faith. If we have faith, that faith makes us want to do things, such as attending church, taking communion, reading the Bible, praying, helping people and a myriad of other acts, i.e., “works”.

So, works (regardless of the word used) are the outward and visible sign of our inward and unseen faith.
“Stand at the gate of the Lord’s house and there proclaim this message: “Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord.”

The passage continues saying to reform our ways and actions and to not trust in deceptive ways. In today’s world with all of its happenings, it is increasingly more difficult to grasp the straightforward narrative of Jeremiah. Simply put, false religion is worthless. As Christians we need to deal with each other justly, do not oppress and do not follow other gods.

Daily we are presented with opportunities to make decisions. Our challenge is in making these decisions, to live our lives following the Ten Commandments. By following the Commandments, and with faith, we can overcome our transgressions and help others as well.

We need to discern what is important in this life and as Christians believe and make decisions justly. We need to be still and listen. We need to understand He is always with us. With this understanding will we, through God, recognize and observe all the things of life and appreciate the wonder of it all.

So in our decision making, whether it be personal, family, religious or some other challenge will we listen and hear? Will we stand at the gate and enter?
But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice and I will be your God, and you shall be my People; and walk in all the way that I command you” But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.

Reading this passage from Jeremiah can be discouraging as we relate it to our present day. Has anything changed? Do people today “incline their ear” or “Obey His voice” any more than the people of Jeremiah’s time? Do we walk stubbornly in our own counsel? Do we harbor evil in our hearts and move backward instead of going forward in our spiritual growth? What’s different between them and us? Only one thing, “The Cross”. We needed a Savior and God provided one! His Son, unblemished lamb, redeemer, payment in full for our debt . . . our sin. My debt, my sin.

Thank you Father for your unfathomable love.
“These sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience bring perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us”

Our entire life has and continues to be full of situations that turn our lives upside down. Failed dreams, troubled relationships, betrayal of those you trusted, lost employment, utter hopelessness and the list is endless. No one is exempted from such fears and anxieties. I refer to these sufferings as “long, dark nights of the soul.” Peace seems unattainable! One’s mind is filled with what ifs, if only, and yes, the ultimate question, “Where is God?”

Did our Lord Jesus die for us to be hopeless? No, Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the breath of the Holy Spirit, hope abounds for you and for me. To hold on to hope is to hold on to the Lord. Hope is the absolute gift the Holy Spirit wants to comfort us with—to know and trust that God already has whatever it is that is troubling our lives in His Mighty Hands! Therefore, we must turn our sufferings over to God and embrace the confidence that everything God has promised us is already in His care!

Now, what remains for us to do is to keep walking forward with the Almighty until we come to the place where each fulfilled promise is waiting
What truth will be known and of what will they be made free?

Jesus is teaching in the Temple. The audience is mostly devout practicing Jews who do not realize who He is and are confused by some of His teachings. However included in this audience are hostile, confrontational scribes and Pharisees who are trying to test Him. He has just settled the case of the adulterous woman brought to Him by these Pharisees by asking the sinless to cast the first stone, and goes to the Temple to teach such as will listen,. He tells them that He will go away. They will seek Him, die in their sin, and cannot follow Him. He speaks to them of the “Father” and they do not understand that He refers to God and of going to Heaven. However, some few listeners do come to understand and believe. It is to these few that He says that they will know the truth (belief in Him as the Son of God) and freedom from sin (salvation resulting from this belief with penitence) will be theirs. How often do we hear the word of God and fail to understand? How often are we shackled with our sins and fail to recognize them? How easily can we be made to know the “Truth” and to understand God’s Commands to and requirements of us for salvation? Perhaps it is not as easy for us to listen as it was for that audience of long ago listening to God Himself. Yet God still speaks to us. His requirements are well known. This Lenten Season is dedicated to speaking and listening contritely to Him. Will we do this, or will we be actively or passively hostile and confrontational scribes and Pharisees?
According to Romans 6, I have been baptized into Christ’s death and buried with Him. As Christ was raised, I am raised from my old self into newness of life. So, if I am “dead to sin,” why do I still sin? My old nature has been part of me for so long, that it’s a struggle to let go of it for that new life in Christ. Yet, this is what I must do! This is what I desire. So, I should daily & deliberately consider myself “dead to sin & alive to God in Christ Jesus.” I must continuously put off that old self & put on my new nature, which is a gift from God. Only then, can I grow in Christ. Only then, can I discard the shackles of sin, which have bound me too long, & become alive to God in Christ Jesus. Yet, it is not through my work, but by God’s grace and mercy, that I am able to grow spiritually. What will you do? Will you choose each day to walk in Christ...to put off that old self & put on the new? Choose life! Choose freedom! For, “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”!

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, Who abides in the shadow of the Almighty Will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust.”

Dwell in his presence & trust in Him. Jesus paid the penalty, so that we can share in the benefits by being in Him. Thanks be to God!
Lenten Day Twenty-Two
Saturday, April 2, 2011

**PSALMS** 87, 90 † 136


“For the wages of sin is death…”

_Romans 6:23_

Max Lucado once wrote that sin in our lives is like what garden shears do to a flower. When snipped, the flower is removed from its source of life. At first the flower stays attractive and beautiful and strong, but over time the stem droops, the petals drop off, and the leaves dry up and fall, No matter what you do to it, it will never live. You can try gluing the petals back on, adding more water, planting it in the ground, or fertilizing it— the flower is still dead. A dead soul has no life. When we, through sin, cut ourselves off from God, we have removed ourselves from our life-giving source and our soul dies. When we sin, the consequence is great. We are not who we were: our eyes no longer see God, our lips do not speak the truth, our hearts grow hard, our hands do evil and not good, and our feet carry us into the abyss. Sin kills the soul.

“... _but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord._”

_Romans 6:23_

We must not stray from God, but stay connected at all times. Use this season as a time to renew your relationship with God. Remember, sin is death to our souls. Wrap yourself in the King’s mantle and be ever ever vigilant.
Lenten Day Twenty-Three
Monday, April 4, 2011

**PSALMS 89:1-18 † 89:19-52**
Jeremiah 16:10-21 † Romans 7:1-12 † John 6:1-15

“…bear fruit for God.”
*Romans 7:4b*

God told Jeremiah to ask the people what sin they had committed against the Lord their God. They had followed their fathers in worshipping other gods and also followed their “own stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me.” God said He would send them into exile and not show favor to them for not listening to Him or bearing fruit. Have we in our country and in our churches left Him for other gods? Are you listening to God or to our culture & following it’s ways & not His?

Psalm 89 sings of the Lord’s steadfast love & his faithfulness to his covenant. It praises Him for his righteousness & justice, exalting the mighty God, who is their strength. God is faithful even when his people are not. Have you praised our righteous God this day for his faithfulness in your life?

In Romans, Paul said that it was the Law that showed his people their sin, but “my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong…to him who has raised us from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.” By baptism we share in the death of Christ & have been discharged from the Law to serve in the new life of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the law “… is holy.” The law still shows us our sin, yet Jesus has delivered us. Thereafter, it is love, not the law, that should rule us. Have you repented from your sins & given your life to God? Are you living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Then, your lives should show forth his fruits. Yes, let us bear much fruit for God and give Him praise!
One of the most troubling questions that believers have to confront is: Why do good people do bad things? St. Paul is dealing with this in the reading from Romans: “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” While all sin is not due to addiction, I think we can agree that addiction is behind much of the bad behavior that we see in otherwise good people.

In his book, Rational Recovery, Jack Trimpey, deals with the same subject as St. Paul, from a scientific perspective. His central idea is that the sovereign “you” can successfully compete with the primitive urges which seek to lure one into self-destructive, appetite-driven behavior (sin). Essential to that success is “Separating yourself from your Beast.” You give it a name, you recognize it as a separate being. St. Paul expounds on this idea as he explains, “So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.” Although Trimpey explains the phenomenon of addiction in purely neurological and psychological terms, it is significant that his plan for defeating it requires the personification of the primitive brain as something outside the sovereign self. This enables the Christian to “love the sinner (including yourself but hate the sin.” Paul is on solid scientific ground when he declares, “For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells within my members.”
Decisions, decisions, decisions.....

Being a Christian requires moment by moment attention to being faithful in what we do and say in life situations. These are good decisions listed in Psalm 101, all beginning with: “I will,” “I may,” or “I shall.”

Lent is the time of year to look at what we do, what we say, and how we respond to ungodly as well as godly influences. It is a time to understand what really makes you happy and fulfilled. It is a wonderful, blessed, and holy opportunity to get to know yourself at a higher level.

Making good decisions, laboring obedient to God’s Word, might not be comfortable and might even go against what is popular both politically and ecclesiastically. However, both Jesus and the Father promise that we shall never hunger or thirst, shall not be lost, and shall be raised on the last day. Our physical, spiritual, and emotional needs shall be met now and later.

In John 6:39, John assures us with Jesus’ wonderful words of life: all of those the Father GIVES me will come to me and 6:27: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Jesus is our Bread of Life. He is our food given by the Father.

Labor in Him in obedience. Let your “I will” please God and bring peace to you.
The Psalmist’s vindictiveness toward his enemies is evident when he says “Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and give them continuous trembling in their loins.” His strong feelings border on hatred and he is consumed by them. He has allowed himself to become a victim. Finally, he asks God to punish his enemies and tells God exactly how to do it.

The detailed descriptions of his feelings and how he wants his enemies punished are very disturbing. He wants revenge and does not realize how spiritually sick he has become. Moreover, if God were to punish his enemies, it is unlikely that he would feel better. His feelings would still be there eating at his soul making him more and more sick.

The Psalmist recognizes that God knows his problems very well when he says, “O God you know my foolishness, and my faults are not hidden from you.” But does the Psalmist know what his foolishness and faults (fears and resentments) are? Can he ask God and his enemies for forgiveness? Can he forgive himself for his part in them?

Internal enemies are far more dangerous than external ones. The message in this psalm is that we cannot get rid of our spiritual illness and receive forgiveness until we do the footwork and turn our resentments over to God. Moreover, we will have to repeat this confessional process regularly or we will slip back into a spiritual illness. We are often more of a part of the problem than we admit and if we are honest we will remember the quote, “We have met the enemy and he is us!”
As I read this psalm, I can envision our church as a choir of joyful voices. God has blessed our church with many musical gifts, from our organist and choir director to each voice in our great choir to each of us in the pew who use our hymns to proclaim our praise.

When I am in church and listen to the exultation of these voices, I can close my eyes and God’s presence comes alive. Each week we have the opportunity to praise and extol Him with music and song. This fills my heart with thanksgiving.

The majesty of the Lord is before us revealing the depth and breadth of his love for us. Who among us has not marveled at a beautiful day, drinking in the Lord’s creation. From the deep earth to the mountain peaks covered with the Lord’s paintbrush of colors, we take time to reflect on the greatness of our God and Father. We are blessed to have a liturgy of praise and thanksgiving to weekly proclaim our love of Christ Jesus.

At this time, as we approach the culmination of a Holy Lent, we as a congregation of God’s people, need to proclaim our praise through our songs, psalms and prayers. This will lead us to the foot of the cross and the knowledge that God the father sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our salvation.

May the love of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you now and forever more.
Many who heard these works turned away. They were not interested in spiritual food. They wanted a king who would continue to feed them physically, as Jesus had recently done with the five thousand. However, Jesus had to make His followers understand that the purpose of His coming was to save their souls, not their bodies. He was and is the Bread of Life, the spiritual food necessary for eternal life. For many of his followers, this message was too much to comprehend.

They lacked faith or simply did not understand. This Bread of Life was a new concept. They had to have faith to believe that Jesus was truly the Son of God. After all, many of them knew Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph. Also, they were expecting a different kind of Messiah. Yet, Jesus was not deterred. He did not back down or water down the requirement for eternal life.

These events in chapter six took place a year and a half before Christ’s death and resurrection. Before His resurrection, would we have had the faith to believe that Jesus was the Son of God? Even though we are now armed with “the written word”, don’t we still struggle with uncertainties?

The most important requirement for us is the constant exercise of faith. Lack of this exercise causes most of our troubles. The Lenten season is the ideal time to work to strengthen our faith. Holy Communion helps to reinforce our spiritual connection to Jesus through His body and blood - the Bread of Life. We cleanse our souls to make room in our hearts for Him.
Lenten Day Twenty-Nine  
Monday, April 11, 2011

Psalms 31 † 35  
Jeremiah 24:1-10 † Romans 9:19-33 † John 9:1-17

“You are my rock and my fortress.”

These scriptures tell the story of our predicament, our need for deliverance, and the light of our redeemer.

Jeremiah, a boy perhaps no older than 13, is chosen by God to become a prophet to speak to Israel. It came to him to tell of the two baskets of figs. One basket held good figs, blessed by God. The other held figs too bad to be eaten to which evil things happened.

The Psalms are the laments, full of deep sorrow. The Psalmist asks for deliverance. “You (God) are my rock and my fortress, into your hand I commit my spirit, you have redeemed me, O Lord, my God” And in Psalm 35:10 “You deliver the weak from those too strong for them, the weak and the needy from those who despoil them.”

Romans 9:19-33 relates the parable of the potter and the clay. The potter and the clay are mentioned in several places in the Old Testament: Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9, and 64:8, Jeremiah 18:1-6. They tell of when God was struggling with rebellious Israel, like a potter working with clay that simply wouldn’t go into the right shape.

In Romans 9:18 Paul says “God has mercy on whom He chooses, and He hardens the heart of whomever He chooses”. And when we ask “Why?”, Paul reminds us that God is the potter and we are the clay. And again, the Gentiles have attained righteousness through faith.

John 9:1-17 is the story of the blind man whom Jesus treated with mud made from His saliva which He spread on the man's eyes, saying to him,“Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means “sent”). Sent is a symbol of Jesus as sent from God to give light.

Those of us who are parents can relate to the premise of molding our children's character into being Christian, developing their gifts and talents to help others and to live a good life. Likewise we can look at our lives and measure them against our goals in our Christian journey to be more Christ like. Where we fall short our Lord is with us to pick us up so we can try again, washed, redeemed and thankful for His life in us.
This chapter opens with the disciples asking Jesus who is to blame for the beggar’s blindness. Is it the parent’s fault or his own? Jesus replies it is neither. It is but a human condition that gave way for God’s grace. This man was healed on the Sabbath which goes against the Law’s of Moses. The Pharisees could not reconcile this to their Law. If anything, they were blinder than the beggar was before the miracle. The beggar’s parents would not get involved for fear of being cast out from the synagogue by the temple priests. The beggar is then cast out and returns to Jesus. Jesus asks him “do you believe in the Son of Man? The beggar answers “tell me who He is so that I may believe in Him.” Jesus says “he is the one speaking to you”. The beggar then says “Lord I believe”. Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Do you need a miracle in order to believe? Your salvation depends on your faith and God’s grace.
Each of us possesses the terrible trait to slam the door of our heart in the face of God’s promises. Not just His promises of salvation and eternal life, but, His promises for our daily lives, for our loved ones and families, for our businesses, for our relationships, for our weaknesses, for our torments, for our bondage of seemly endless sins.

What we must holdfast to is God’s love is everlasting and relentless. We may chose to surround ourselves with anxiety, distress, perplexity and grief; however, when we call upon Him, Jesus moves right in the mix of whatever situation we find ourselves in the middle of and He will take control. Jesus is not reluctant to step into our deepest confusion and despair. If we only asked, Jesus will bring comfort, healing, peace and deliverance.

As we move further into our Lenten journey, may each of us call upon our Lord at all times and in all places!
“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.”

John 10:27-29

This quote taken from the middle of today’s gospel means so much to me. Jesus has just been questioned by the Jews about whether he is truly the Messiah and he has answered by telling them he has spoken by deed and yet is not believed by the majority of his people. Only his sheep hear and know he is the Messiah, and then he makes the wonderful statement above. His sheep (that’s you and me) hear his voice and will be rewarded for that faith with eternal life, and (listen up) nothing can take them away from him. Boy that really ought to make you sit up and take notice, once you are His, you are the Fathers too forever.

That is great but it isn’t the best part. Jesus the Son of God, omnipotent and eternal says that his sheep which the Father has given him are greater than all else. God thinks so much of you and me that he values us above all else. How can we be sad, lonely or angry when our God loves us so much that he thinks we are the most valued item in the universe. So praise God today and decide that you are worthy of being his sheep not by what you do, think or feel, but because Jesus believes that you are. When you firmly grasp this idea, then you can reflect God’s loving face to the world.
Seeing is believing? Jesus knew that even before he raised Lazarus from the dead that this miracle from God would be to God’s glory. What more could one possibly ask from God? Please bring back my loved one. Lazarus was also Jesus’ friend and he loved him. He was sadden by his death and he wept as we do when we lose a loved one. Mary and Martha really wanted Jesus just to heal their brother before he died and Jesus did not. Little did they know what was about to happen four days after Lazarus had died. Jesus told them that he would rise from the dead, but they thought that Jesus meant that it would be like everyone else. Once you die and you believe in Him you live in eternal life with God. Jesus had something else in mind. Jesus had to explain to them to come with him to his tomb. Jesus said aloud to Lazarus,” rise from the dead”, and he did still wrapped in cloth. It was truly a miracle, one that was almost beyond belief. The happiness and thankfulness was tremendous. Word spread of this great miracle. And, at dinner one night with Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, many came to see that he was indeed alive again. They had heard, but just could believe their ears. They came not for Jesus’ sake but to see Lazarus for their own eyes. This brought many to follow Jesus. After all, this was what the miracle was all about, giving God the glory and converting many.

I guess in this case, seeing is believing!
“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

Have you ever been thirsty...really thirsty? Most of us have at least been thirsty enough to welcome a long draught of water & be refreshed. We know how good that is. What about spiritual thirst? Has your soul panted for God “as the deer pants for streams of water”? Has your soul been downcast...disturbed? Have you been depressed and felt that God had forsaken you? think that Mary & Martha felt that Jesus had forsaken them and Lazarus. When their brother became sick, they had sent for Jesus. When Jesus did come, Mary fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” However, Jesus had not forgotten them. He was getting ready to show them “the glory of the Lord.” Our Lord longs for us to come to Him, for He is our rock. He is the remedy for depression, so don’t be downcast. Look up to the living God. Quench your spiritual thirst with a long draught of the living water. Discover how good that is!

Offer Him praise & thanksgiving. He will refresh you.
St. John emphasizes an interesting aspect of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. The people who had witnessed the miracle had spread the word throughout the area. Unusually large crowds converged on Jerusalem for the Passover when they heard that both Jesus and Lazarus would be there. They wanted to see both of them. The chief priests were angry because the crowds were deserting the traditional Jewish religion and flocking to Jesus. They blamed Jesus’ miracle for the enthusiasm the crowds showed and hoped to kill both Jesus and Lazarus when they arrived in Jerusalem. They thought that would be an easy way to solve their problem.

St. John does not tell us what Lazarus’ fate is, but the multitude hailed Jesus waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!” Can you imagine how furious this welcome made the chief priests! Furthermore, Jesus rode on the back of a young donkey fulfilling the prophesy: “Do not be afraid daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

As so often happened, the disciples were clueless to the meaning of these events. Only after Jesus was “glorified” did they understand them. On the other hand, the Pharisees were realistic and understood that they could do nothing since the “world has gone after him.” The chief priests had to regroup and devise another plan. Little did they know that their evil plan would make that dark Friday Good.
In this passage the Greeks- “outsiders”- had traveled many long and difficult miles to, hopefully, see the Christ. They were believers within a culture that were not professing in Jesus, a righteous remnant, willing to pay a costly price. The fruit they bore because of their personal sacrifice was somewhat a surprise to them and others witness to their faith. They received words of hope from Christ himself born from the Holy Spirit wooing their hearts of love and curiosity.

I am moved, again, by others far-reaching desire to become strangers or foreigners in their own land, willing to loose families or friends and personal comfort to find truth and life abundant, found only in Christ. Hating the given trappings of the world, the deep “knowingness” that there is something more than this, they were willing to surrender their own way to not just see Jesus but follow him. Their obedience equaled blessing. Their sacrifice produced something far greater than what they could have ever hoped or imagined. Christ honored them with His presence, His words of truth, and His love.

When hearing that whisper or tug in our heart, do we respond,” yes, Lord,” taking the challenge of trust and obedience? Or do we ignore those convictions because they seem difficult, annoying and insignificant.

Remember, “the outsiders” won then and will now!
Holy Week: Lenten Day Thirty-Seven  
Wednesday, April 20, 2011

Psalms 55 † 74  
Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17 † Philippians 4:1-13 - 2:11 † John 12:27-36

Jesus said to them “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness you don’t know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.”

John 12:35-36

Jesus was trying not only describing the events about to transpire there in Jerusalem but through-out the era to come for his followers. He was using words that would be familiar to a people used to walking everywhere they went, finding their way along both familiar and unfamiliar terrain. Sage advice for those to whom a fall was a potentially life threatening event not just a mere bother that might require some treatment. But as with many of his parables and sayings the people around him could not understand the meaning. I often wonder if we can understand his parable now. We have the benefit of seeing the immediate meaning of the parable, but have we forgotten the parable is still true today? After the resurrection we know the Holy Spirit was sent to comfort and guide Jesus’ followers but are we paying attention his message. We still have the light with us, and we need to walk in that light so that we do not stumble, for one day the light will be gone and we will not have more chances. So this day remember the words of Christ and walk in and be guided by the light of Christ so that our footsteps are sure and directed to the reward of the faithful.
The seventeenth chapter of John brings us to the time in the human life of the Christ where he claims his divinity as the second person of the Godhead and prays to God the Father “to glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” It is here that Jesus prays in the garden before his earthly surrender to the temple guards and his walk to Calvary as the perfect propitiation for the sins of the world.

Each year on Maundy Thursday as we gather for a final celebration of the Holy Eucharist until Saturday evening at sundown when we gather for The Great Vigil and the celebration of our Lord’s resurrection, I am reminded of the enormity of event that is about to occur. God himself has taken human form in the person of his Son Jesus, the Christ, and has, up close and personally, revealed himself to his people and taken them by the hand to teach them something of what his holiness looks like (the Word has become flesh and walked among mankind). God has done this in order to reclaim his people from the bondage of sin (a life outside his holy presence) and provide for them a path, which, if followed, will lead them to salvation and a new life free from sin (a life eternally in his presence).

On that first Maundy Thursday God, through Jesus, provided the foundation for what the Church now celebrates as the Holy Eucharist. He made the connection between his body and the bread which he broke, ate and distributed to them and also between his blood and the wine which he drank and passed around the room for them to drink and in very powerful words established a new covenant with mankind saying, “… this is my body, … this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many …” and then solemnly told them that the time for his sacrifice was at hand, “… I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Today, two thousand years later, what was established in that simple room in Jerusalem symbolizes for the Church, that which unifies us as the followers of the Christ, our oneness with him and with God though our fellowship of the body and the blood.

Come Lord Jesus, Come!
...Joseph of Arimathe’a who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews ... Nicode’mus also, who had at first came to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes . . John 19: 38 & 39

Joseph of Arimathe’a and Nicode’mus are two men who love and respected Jesus but not publicly. Joseph of Arimathe’a is described as a disciple of Jesus or a student of Jesus “BUT SECRETLY, FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS”. Nicode’mus came to Jesus “BY NIGHT”.

They came to Jesus for teaching and understanding, but lived in fear of being caught by the Jews. What guilt they must have felt at this moment. Maybe if they had spoken out . . . What if? Is this how we are living out our lives as Christians? Are we coming to church on Sunday Mornings but leaving what we see and learn behind during the business week? Do we try to separate our “religious beliefs” from our “business beliefs”, or our “political beliefs”?  

The time has come for us to live as Christians every day of our lives. Christianity is a way of life, not just some nice thoughts we need to look at once in a while to feel good. We can either sneak into the church each week and play Christians or we can live it every day of our lives. Is there a cost for living this way? You bet! But the cost you pay is nothing compared to the cost that has been paid for you. Take another look at the crucifix. As a Christian your life has been paid for a price. Are you willing to proclaim it or will you continue to hide it.
Each of the four gospels presents us with their own account of the Passion narrative with varying details. Although we only hear it read twice each year it is a most familiar story that includes the disciples running away as Jesus is arrested in the garden. Surely Jesus anticipated this betrayal, not only by Judas with his infamous kiss, but by the other disciples who fled the scene abandoning him to the cross. Surly he did know as he had already confronted Peter with his prediction of Peter's thrice denial of him. When we look at the disciples it is Peter that most of us can identify with. At times he is impetuous stepping out without forethought; at other times he is loyal to the core and willing to die with his Lord; yet his words do not always match his actions. Sounds familiar doesn't it?

We are at the end of our Lenten journey. It has been a long 40 days. We made pledges at the beginning that we would enter this season with good intentions to keep it holy. The cross confronts us today with the question "how holy has our Lenten journey been?"

Most of us live our Christian lives between confession and denial. If we are honest we admit that there are those times when we like Peter willingly confess Jesus as Lord and other times we flatly deny him by our thoughts, words, and deeds. Our actions belie our words. We vacillate in our discipleship because we have yet to completely surrender to God; to empty ourselves of self in order that we might be filled by God's grace and love. The ashes of Lent have long since faded from our foreheads, but the indelible sign of the cross traced at our baptisms has not. The cross on Good Friday reminds us that in spite of our sinfulness, and our lack of holiness, that we belong to God. God still loves us. The cross is a sign of His undying love, an unconditional love, a perfect love. It is a challenge for us to continue the journey to holiness in response to His love. If we are reminded of nothing else this day let it be this- that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for our sins and the sins of the world so that we might become his children, co-heirs with Christ, as inheritors of the Kingdom.
Prayer of St. Ignatius

“Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will. All I have and possess, Thou hast given all this to me. To Thee, O Lord, I restore it; all is Thine, dispose of it entirely according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.”